



May 30, 2020

MAYORAL CANDIDATES TAKE A STAND BEFORE TUESDAY'S DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY ELECTION

*Democratic Primary-Fields and Gibson
General Election-Winner of Democratic Primary and Branyan and West*

The 4 Mayoral candidates have had the following OneBoard question with its 4 counterparts since Friday, May 22, 2020. Each candidate was asked to respond no later than noon today. Responses are copied and pasted exactly as each candidate responded to OneBoard. The Democratic Primary is a race between Tony Fields and Dan Gibson on Tuesday, June 2, 2020. The winner of that race then runs against Independents Richard Branyan and Phillip West. Messrs. Fields' and Gibson's responses follow, first, in the order they were received by OneBoard. Mr. Branyan's responses follow their responses. OneBoard will post Mr. West's responses when he responds. OneBoard thanks the candidates for their participation.

QUESTION:

The current City budget, with only 40 - 45% of the total population of Adams County, is \$37 million, compared with Adams County's budget of \$27 million. The City cannot pay its bills, and has had more than a half dozen city clerks since July 2016. Are you in favor of:

1. *Trying to annex more of the county, to generate more money for the City?*
2. *Raising city taxes on the dwindling number of city residents and property owners?*
3. *Reducing, based on Stennis Institute statewide municipal employment studies figures, the number of city employees in line with cities of similar size, in consideration of continuing population loss?*
4. *Lowering city elected officials' pay, in line with Stennis Institute statewide municipal employment salary studies.*

VOTE

OneBoardNatchezAdams is a non-partisan, grassroots effort to Save the Area. Its supporters are for consolidation of all local government services. No Mayoral candidate has come out publicly to support OneBoard's proposal for consolidation of all local government services. OneBoard encourages everyone with a family and/or financial interest in the area to study the issues, described at

www.oneboardnatchezadams.com.



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MR. FIELDS, running in Tuesday's Democratic Primary against Dan Gibson:

1. The subject of annexing more of the county's residential areas was introduced when I served on the board and I was against it and I'm still against it. Annexing would mean more services the city would have to provide to a wider range and more infrastructure to maintain. We are having enough trouble providing services and maintaining infrastructure as it is. We need to be more effective and efficient with what we currently have and provide better services in our current situation.

2. I am definitely not for raising city property taxes! We will have to live within our means and I know some tough decisions will have to be made. I do believe the Mayor and BOA have taken positive steps to get the city's financials in order. I will create an environment and a culture that supports the city clerks office. There has been too much turnover in recent years. I will ensure that everyone in the clerks office is cross-trained so if a key person is out, the operation is not at a standstill. Depending on what I find in terms of how far behind we may be on audits, reconciliations, etc. We may have to hire a firm to come in on a very temporary basis to assist the clerk and get us caught up.

3. I would have to look at the function and effectiveness of each employee to make that determination [regarding staff reduction in line with Stennis statewide reporting]. I will evaluate this during my first 100 days in office. We will look at the model of employees who retire or resign not be replaced in some instances. The responsibilities of those employees can be equitably divided among the remaining staff. My focus for effective staffing will not be administrative but ensuring that we have boots on the ground to make sure our city is clean and safe. (I will employ the theory of an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. Many city jobs are essential, however, we must look to proficiency and efficiency as it relates to ALL city employees)

I also know that we have not participated in the municipal survey since I left office. I will make it a priority that we send in our data!

4. If elected Mayor, I will be taking a salary decrease from where I am now. I do not believe the salary is commensurate with my years of work experience, level of education, and the amount of scrutiny that comes along with the position. I'm ok with that because I believe I can offer the stability and consistency needed to lead this city through the current crisis and into the future. I will not suggest a decrease for any elected officials, if they wish to decrease their salary on their own, that's their prerogative.

MR. GIBSON, running in Tuesday's Democratic Primary against Tony Fields:

1. I am not in favor of annexation, and I will not support such a measure.

2. I will not support tax increases in Natchez. Tax increases are a deterrent to growth. Over twenty years ago, when facing budget challenges as a young Mayor of Crystal Springs, I refused any attempt to raise taxes and instead aggressively managed the city budget, balancing it every year and leaving a twenty percent budget surplus in my last year. I will apply these proven fiscal management skills to the budget challenges in Natchez.

3. I have a record already of reducing the size of government. In Crystal Springs, we applied hiring freezes. Over time, without lay offs but through attrition, we were able to reduce the size of government and live within our means. I did this then. I know I can do this now.

4. This [lowering city elected officials' pay in line with Stennis] will be a decision of the Board of Aldermen. Obviously, Natchez should be in line with cities of comparable size and composition. I will definitely give this consideration.



MR. BRANYAN, running in the General Election (not the Tuesday Democratic Primary), response on Facebook:

1. I don't believe the city would be allowed to attempt to annex more of the county because the city's population is in decline (I also don't think the folks out of the city limits would be in favor either - so it won't happen). The City is subsidizing the fire protection in the county - which is unfair to the city folk.

2. The city has to cut costs - we were spending too much before Coronavirus and now we will be in a severe financial pinch with losses of revenue.

3. Natchez is fortunate to have a much larger budget than other cities its size - largely because of tourism and gaming revenues. Employment has increased to spend the money - we have no rainy day fund and can't even cover payroll without taking out tax anticipation loans to cover shortfalls. We need to cut costs and build a surplus for at very least cover the payroll.

4. The salaries for the aldermen are above average for the state - the mayor's salary is probably in line with other cities with a similar size budget (but maybe with smaller populations).

Our outgoing Mayor has only been taking a small part of his salary as it would adversely affect his retirement. I don't see the salaries as the problem as much as some of the people we elect.

I have nothing against the concept of annexation, but the folks who you annex have to see a benefit for higher taxes. The folk moved out of the city because of high taxes low service - until you fix that and provide growth you can't annex.

MR. WEST, running in the General Election (not the Tuesday Democratic Primary):

OneBoard will post Mr. West's responses when he responds.

